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Re: Letter of Support for Menaka Thomas

Monday 21 September 2026

To the Queensland Arts Project Fund Assessment Panel,

Re: Letter of Support – *UNSTRUCK* (Menaka Thomas and Guy Webster)

I'm very pleased to support **Menaka Thomas's** application to the Queensland Arts Project Fund to develop *UNSTRUCK*, a new immersive work she will co-create with composer, sound designer and sound artist **Guy Webster**. Excuse the length of this letter, however there is significant information to share in just a few words.

I've known Menaka for many years through my work in Queensland's music and arts sector, including as **Director of Programming, Industry Development at QMusic, Project Manager of the RASN Creative Business Champion Program, Program Manager at BEMAC, Partnership Manager at Arts Queensland** and other roles. I'm currently Executive General Manager of the Australian Live Music Business Council, with almost 3,000 sole trader and small business members across the continent. I also consult on music industry development and live music policy for local governments across Australia, work with Yama Nui Records, am Secretary of the Sunshine Coast Music Industry Collective and sit on the board of the newly-formed Gold Coast Music Alliance.

Menaka began learning South Indian Carnatic music at the age of five from her mother, Vijaya Visvanathan, and later studied contemporary voice at the Queensland Conservatorium. Her debut album *My Eyes Can See* was the first recording of her own songs, and in 2023 she won the **Queensland Music Award for Best Song (World)** for *Space*, her collaboration with Brisbane songwriter mou. She has performed at Woodford Folk Festival, Festival of Tibet, BrisAsia Festival and Brisbane Powerhouse's *Women in Voice* and sold out the Queensland Multicultural Centre on numerous occasions. More recently she has sung in *Back to Bilo* for Brisbane Festival and Darwin Festival, where she also presented her heritage workshop *Where Sound Meets Story*. She works as a producer too, including Assistant Producer for BrisAsia Festival in 2023.

UNSTRUCK is the right project for Menaka at this point in her career. Much of her recent work has centred on honing her skills in live performance and community workshops. This development gives her dedicated time to work without a fixed outcome, exploring how the space between stillness and action can become something an audience hears, feels and

moves through. She'll be building new skills in live looping and vocal processing, and bringing movement from her Bharatanatyam training back into her performance. It's a considered creative risk, and it follows naturally and powerfully from the direction her work has been heading.

The partnership with Guy Webster is one of the proposal's biggest strengths. The two have already worked well together through recorded music and *Back to Bilo*, and Guy's background across composition, sound design, theatre, dance, installation and new media gives the project the technical depth it needs, particularly as they test whether responsive and sensor-based technology can shape the sonic space. Guy is simply an incredible musical collaborator and the right person at the right time.

The intimate public showing in Brisbane for around 50 people (venue TBC), is a sensible way to test the work outside a conventional concert format. Feedback from the audience and invited peers will give Menaka and Guy a clear sense of whether *UNSTRUCK* is best developed as a live performance, an installation or a hybrid of the two. One original sonic composition from the process will also be professionally recorded.

I have no hesitation about Menaka's capacity to deliver outputs of the highest artistic and professional quality. She has put together regional runs in Bundaberg that paired evening shows with daytime workshops run alongside local council and community groups, and this year alone she has worked across the Sunshine Coast, Bundaberg, Moreton Bay and Darwin. She is organised, open to feedback and reliable, and she follows through on what she commits to.

I give Arts Queensland and the assessment panel my strongest, fervent request to invest in this stage of *UNSTRUCK*. It will give Menaka room to stretch her practice with a trusted collaborator, and I believe the work has a life well beyond this first development, with clear potential for contemporary music, festival, gallery and interdisciplinary performance settings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AM' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ant McKenna

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